

THE SALLIE JOHNSON DERELICT

An Adventurous Voyage to the Saragossa Sea.

By Frederic Van Rensselaer Dey.

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"As near as I can make out from the details you have given me," said Capt. Darrington, applying a lighted match to his freshly replenished pipe and for a moment vanishing amid the cloud of smoke which he ejected, "there is about as much chance of our finding the long-lost derelict as there is of discovering the proverbial needle in the much abused stack of hay. The records of the hydrographic office have demonstrated repeatedly that earth nor sky, nor sea, possesses a more erratic or unstable quantity than the wandering derelict of the south Atlantic ocean."

"Very true," responded the captain's vis-à-vis, whose personal appearance afforded instant evidence of what he was, a retired capitalist, not yet past the prime of life, who had attained the portly physique, plethoric pocket book, placid countenance and easy consequence of the successful and not over-scrupulous business man. His dignity never deserted him, and yet it was always that easy dignity which is frequently mistaken for cordiality, but which is never really more than diplomacy. "Very true," he repeated, after a moment's pause; "nevertheless facts are facts, and the information that I possess is one that has frequently been re-established by those same official hydrographic reports. The derelict did exist up to a date not yet six months old, for she was at that time sighted, identified and reported. Prior to that time she had not been reported for almost a year, which is circumstantial evidence that she may be presumed to be in existence yet. If she is in existence, I believe that you can find her. If you discover her, the \$5,000,000 which she contains belongs to us. One-tenth to you and the balance to me, because I undertake to meet the entire expense of the expedition, beside paying you a competent salary for your services. I cannot understand why you hesitate; when you have everything to gain and nothing to lose, and where even the element of personal danger need not be taken into consideration, for I cannot see that there is any involved. Of course I shall accompany you on this voyage."

Richard Darrington swung himself out of the chair in which he had been half buried, and striking a quarter-deck attitude before his companion, with his feet wide apart as if to resist the lurching of a rolling ship, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waist-coat, and with his pipe held firmly between his white and even teeth, said deliberately, but firmly: "I will tell you in one sentence why I hesitate. It is because you have not told me half the story. When I was in the navy I always left port with sealed orders which I could not open until I was far at sea. I am no longer in the navy, and I will not again, for you or any man, begin a voyage in that way. If you are willing to tell me all there is to tell, I will listen, and doubtless accept the commission you offer me. Unless you are willing to do so, let us change the subject."

"There are others, Capt. Darrington, who might not be so arbitrary," said the capitalist coldly. "Then apply to them," responded Darrington. "As for me, I will have none of it upon any other conditions than those I have named," and the stern naval officer relaxed the attitude he had taken and reseated himself in the chair.

For several moments Mr. Gregory was silent. His brows were knitted in deep thought and he drummed the ends of his fingers against one another, keeping time with a low, tuneless whistling which escaped his lips.

"Very well," he exclaimed with sudden impulse, "you shall have the story as I know it. Afterwards, if you will go to my house with me you shall see the proofs of its verity; all this, however, with the understanding that you accept the commission, and we sail without any alterations can be completed."

Darrington made no reply, and Gregory, accepting the silence his implied consent, continued:

"You are aware, Capt. Darrington, that a little more than a year ago, I was engaged in the South American trade, and you should know, if you do not, that my success in that business was due almost entirely to the influence



"I Will Tell You in One Sentence Why I Hesitate."

that I possessed with the foremost men of those revolutionary countries, with which I did business. It there was a concession to be obtained, I could always secure it against every competitor. Even the private affairs of many of the great men of those revolutionary countries frequently came under my personal care. Spanish men as Blanes, Crespo, Ezeta, Balmaceda, Acosta of Peru and others who were their political opponents and enemies consulted me, or left their private fortunes in my hands for safe keeping or distribution, when about to organize a fresh revolution. They knew by their own experience and by the experience of others before them that the trust would be fulfilled. It is

like obstinacy the storm-driven wrecks and derelicts which wind and currents force that way. A derelict wandering at the will of wind and waves will glide for hundreds of miles along the edges of that dreary place and never enter there; but when once driven by the force of a gale such as Capt. Graham describes, end on against it, it is more than likely that the violence of the storm has opened crevices in the weedy mass, through which the wreck may be forced and forever lost to human knowledge. I have no doubt that there are wrecks and derelicts in that mysterious region now, which have been adrift for scores of years, and which may continue to float as many more. I have no doubt that there are other fortunes there as great as this one which has excited your curiosity and mine. I say this, Mr. Gregory, not to argue against the expedition we are to undertake, but to impress upon you the absolute futility of continuing the search beyond the margin of that sea of weeds, should we ultimately decide that the Sallie Johnson has fallen into its embrace."

"He paused, as if expecting some comment from his companion, but there was none and presently he went on again: "It is not necessary that I should mention the names of those who were originally interested in this fortune. Suffice it to say that there is no person now alive who possesses, or who may possess any legal claim to this amount in gold, which is stored in 10 different compartments of the wandering derelict. The compartments were prepared expressly for what they now contain, and \$5,000,000 was stowed in each one of them. I have in my possession a set of blueprint tracings of the vessel, showing where each of these compartments is located and how they may be discovered and made to discharge their treasures. These blue prints came into my possession in a perfectly natural way, but were delayed in transmission nearly three years, so that when I did receive them, there remained no possibility of fulfilling the trust that had been imposed upon me, and, besides, there was a saving clause among the documents, which bestowed the wealth absolutely upon me in the event of certain contingencies happening. Every one of those contingencies had arisen before I received the documents and tracings, and in addition to that, the vessel which contained the treasure had never been spoken or heard from since she started on her voyage to New York. I say never heard from; that is, however, not strictly true, since a part of her crew were picked up and saved by a tramp steamer bound for China. These men reported the total wreck of their vessel, the loss of their effects and half the crew, and their own narrow escape from death. It was with great difficulty that I got trace of them and subsequently became convinced that the treasure ship had gone to the bottom."

"Not very long ago it happened by accident that I examined one of the official hydrographic reports, and there I saw the name of this very vessel, as describing one of the hundreds of derelicts which are floating about the seas constant menace to navigation."

"You have thus far neglected to mention the name of this derelict," interposed Darrington quietly, but not without irony.

"Be patient," was the quick response, "for since I have chosen to relate the story, I will tell it all. She was called the Sallie Johnson, of Yarmouth. When she entered the South American port, from which she sailed, a vessel laden with gold, but ostensibly with a cargo of fruits and spices, consigned to my house of which I was at that time the head, she had been purchased and fitted up expressly for a treasure ship. Her officers and crew were discharged, with their consent to forego the stippling articles they had signed. The name of the vessel—she was a bark—was changed to La Paloma, and under that name she cleared for New York, although the formality of painting out her former name and port of sailing was neglected, and as a derelict, which she now is, she is known by the name which she bore when she left the stocks and glided down the ways of Yarmouth. The United States hydrographic office records of Gregory, had provided them with every information it possessed, and Darrington, in addition to studying charts and data, and examining thoroughly the documents and tracings in the possession of Gregory, had imbued all the enthusiasm of his owner concerning the voyage and its results.

Also, with the thoroughness of an experienced naval officer, he had examined and experimented with the hydraulic apparatus with which the yacht was provided, and he had convinced himself that Gregory had not overestimated the possibilities of his invention. He was satisfied that with judgment he might venture at least a little way into the maze of weeds and drifting things so dredged by sailors of all classes since the ocean became a known and traveled highway.

During the several years since the Sallie Johnson became a derelict her wanderings had been confined to the boundaries described by Gregory, and from the reports from time to time sent in by the captains who had sighted her, the hydrographic office had made tracings of her voyagings. Copies of these tracings Darrington possessed, and during the first month of the search, they followed them in a zigzag course, hoping that the winds and currents that had influenced her before still directed her.

A month was consumed in this manner when the yacht put in at the Island of Martinique for resailing, and then the search was resumed.

Practically the same methods were pursued; the same zigzag courses were laid and the same waters searched with watchful eyes and unceasing vigilance.

But without reward. No derelict of any description was sighted. The vessels that they spoke from time to time, had sighted none, and knew of none, and sincerely hoped they never might; so that at last, after nearly four months voyaging and three times resailing, they found themselves one midday in latitude 27 degrees north and longitude 40 degrees west, with silent engines, floating upon the placid glass-like surface of the sea, which washes against the wilderness of weeds so aptly named Saragossa.

All hope of discovering the derelict outside that labyrinth of weeds had been abandoned, and now they found themselves confronted by a difficulty unforeseen. The sailors on board the yacht positively refused to assist in taking her into that unknown and mysterious place and were on the point of mutiny. Commands, entreaties and promises of reward were alike unavailing. The men refused to go, and there seemed no help for it, but to abandon the enterprise at the moment when it seemed nearest to success, and when had yet shown, "we must penetrate even that, if need be, to find her."

"Humph!" said Capt. Darrington, complacently leaning back in his chair, and emitting a volume of smoke worthy of the funnel of a man-of-war. "Have you any idea what the Saragossa sea is like? Do you know how impossible it is to penetrate it, or having penetrated it to escape again into the open sea? If your Sallie Johnson has found entrance there, \$5,000,000 is too small a price for her deliverance, or \$5,000,000,000 is that matter. Once involved in that labyrinth of weeds and wrecks, there is only one exit for a seafarman, and that is straight to the coral beds beneath it. However, she may not have entered there. The Saragossa sea, although deadly in its aggressions upon its domain, has some power which repels with cushioning arms which entangle and hold every thing they grasp, repulse with cushion-

ing force that way. A derelict wandering at the will of wind and waves will glide for hundreds of miles along the edges of that dreary place and never enter there; but when once driven by the force of a gale such as Capt. Graham describes, end on against it, it is more than likely that the violence of the storm has opened crevices in the weedy mass, through which the wreck may be forced and forever lost to human knowledge. I have no doubt that there are wrecks and derelicts in that mysterious region now, which have been adrift for scores of years, and which may continue to float as many more. I have no doubt that there are other fortunes there as great as this one which has excited your curiosity and mine. I say this, Mr. Gregory, not to argue against the expedition we are to undertake, but to impress upon you the absolute futility of continuing the search beyond the margin of that sea of weeds, should we ultimately decide that the Sallie Johnson has fallen into its embrace."

It was two bells in the afternoon watch when the yacht entered the Saragossa sea. An hour had been consumed in making the alterations in her machinery, so that when the sun went down, as it did about 6 o'clock, Capt. Darrington estimated that they had left 20 miles of weeds behind them.

Then the engines were stilled, and everything was made snug for the night; and what a night it was! The mass of weeds which surrounded them on every side seemed to be on fire. Strange phosphorescent lights gleamed over them like darting flames, unlike anything they had ever witnessed before. Swishing, gliding, rustling noises filled the air, as serpents were at play upon that treacherous surface. Louder and still stranger noises came to them from distances, and it was as though they had glided into another world, hitherto unvisited by man.

Darrington had the men piped aft, and sternly addressed them for the last time.

"Men," he said, and his voice was like the ship's bell, ringing clear and true, "there are reasons why I do not blame you for objecting to enter upon this unknown sea. That you have superstitions concerning it, I know; I possess them myself, until I was convinced that this vessel possesses a power which can subdue its dangers. With scarcely an exception, you have been in the employ of Mr. Gregory since this vessel was launched. Has she ever been a Jonah? Has she ever made an unlucky voyage, or fallen in with an ominous event, and will you who are sailors still abandon a vessel which has been your master always? More than that, will you forsake a man who has been your friend as well as your employer, because you see ahead of you a suggestion of danger? Are you sailors tried and true, or are you cowards? One more word, and I am finished. I am captain here, and I will be obeyed. The man who refuses to obey will be

sent out the measurements here," placing his hand upon a sheet of paper that laid upon the table. "They are mathematically exact. I can put my finger over the precise spot where each compartment is located. We must bore through the hull at these places—I have indicated them here—saw out sections of the planking, penetrate to the inner hull, pierce that in the same manner, and the gold—the treasure for which we have searched so long—will be exposed to our view, where we have but to reach in our hands and remove it."

"It is great!" exclaimed Gregory with enthusiasm. "It is magnificent!"

Out upon the deck the men were grouped along the starboard rail, looking and discussing the derelict. The captain closely followed by Gregory, was seated in the cabin.

Hasty orders were given, three of the machinists were detailed as assistants, measurements were taken from bow to stern of the floating wreck, from the forecastle down, sounding and staves and other tools were produced and the work commenced.

But with the dawn of another day the illusions of the night were dispelled. Gregory offered a reward to the first man who should sight a derelict; and they had not made three more knots through the weedy mass before a dozen were discovered. Another knot and the yacht seemed to be in the vortex of the Saragossa sea, around which the mass of weeds and floating things revolve, drawing all things to its center. There were solid masses of weed-grown wrecks, brown with age and mold, and green and red and yellow with moss and vegetation.

There were sleepless eyes aboard the yacht that night. I neared sights and sounds all thought of slumber, and the watch upon the deck comprised the whole ship's crew.

But with the dawn of another day the excitement which neither the captain nor Gregory could conceal, impelled him to move.

Capt. Darrington's own hands pried the saw. Piece by piece he flung aside the half-broken bits of planking that he sawed away.

Then the aperture stared open before him, and peering through, he saw a heap of canvas bags, and he knew that part of the treasure was found.

Reaching in his hand, he drew one out with difficulty, and passed it to the deck, where Gregory seized upon it with delight.

Then another and yet others till they ceased to count, and sawed through the growing heap littered upon the deck.

And then, while yet there were others still unopened, Capt. Darrington felt a trembling shudder beneath him which he knew to be caused by the rotting derelict.

His sailor-lore told him all too surely what it was and what it meant.

He leaped to his feet with a warning cry to his companions. With one impulse they sprang for the rail of the already heeling yacht.

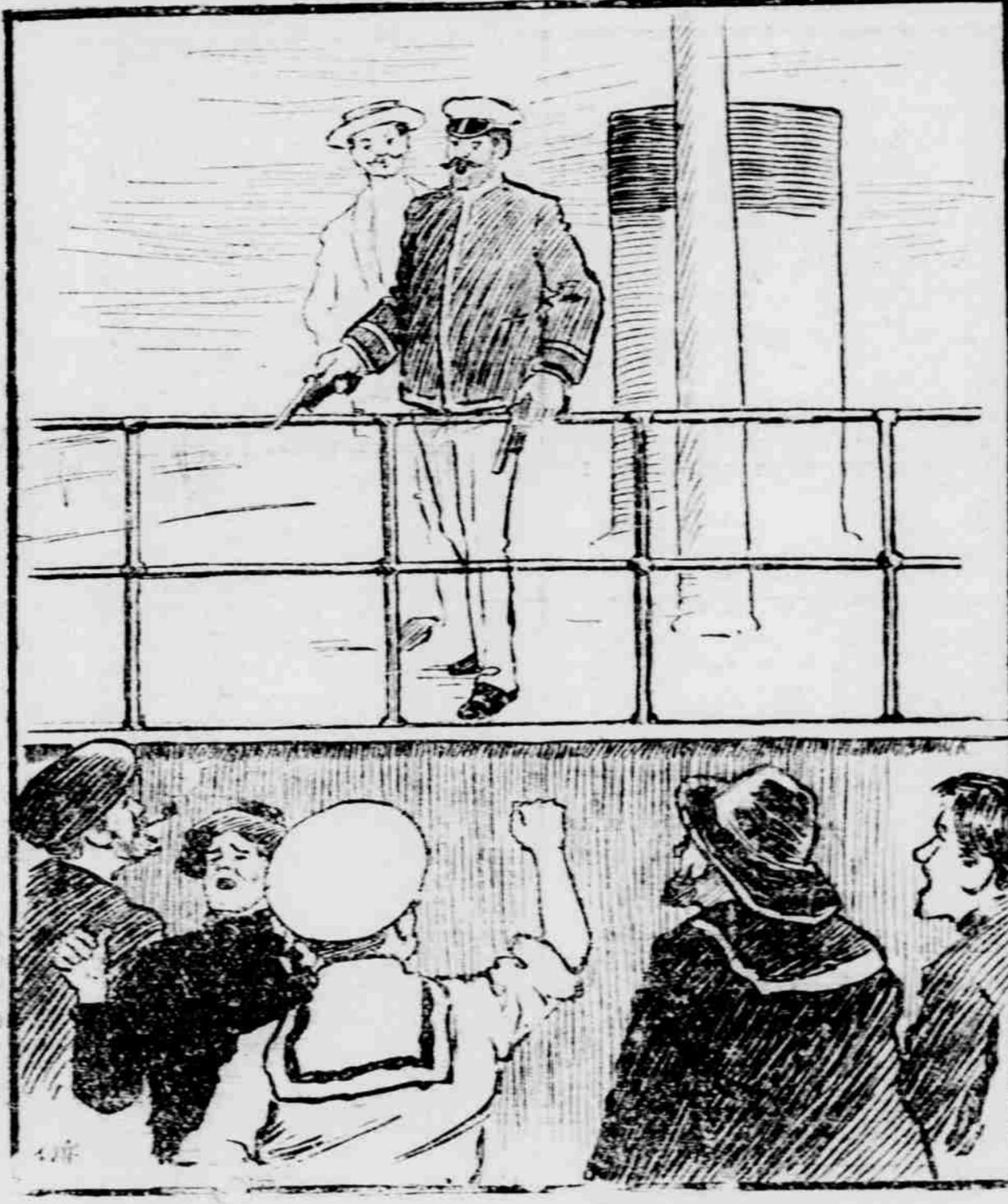
"Axes, and cut away for your lives!" cried the captain as he seized the rail. "The wreck is sinking, and will drag us down. Quick—for your lives!" They were none too quick. The derelict like an oyster-soaked sponge which yet has buoyancy enough to float, lost that buoyancy when her side was pierced, and the gases generated there were permitted to escape. She loosened her faint hold upon life and disappeared beneath the waves, dragging the yacht's nose under, loading her deck with sudden seaweed, and almost making a wreck of her.

But the men worked quickly and with a will. The yacht was righted and saved, and an hour later, with her great pumps working to their full capacity, she was tearing her way back again through the sea of weeds, homeward bound.

Of the fortune they had sought to reclaim, scarcely one-twentieth part was recovered, and Gregory, after paying Darrington his share, divided a large portion of what was left among his crew.

And if there lives a man quite brave enough to search the bottom of the sea where the Sallie Johnson sank, Capt. Darrington will acquaint him with the exact latitude and longitude of the spot for his adventure.

THE END.



Then the Voice of Darrington Rang Out
Every One

represented for mutiny, if I do not kill him before a port is reached?"

With deliberate calmness, but with flashing eyes and with stern demeanor, he drew two revolvers from his pockets and poised them in his hands. Gregory, standing beside him did likewise; and then the voice of Darrington, clearer and louder than before, rang out in stern command.

"To your stations, every one of you! He who disobeys me now or refuses instant and perfect compliance with orders dies." Officer of the deck, head on, full speed!" and he pointed one of the revolvers full at the breast of the frightened man.

The men were cowed into obedience. Almost before they realized what had been done the yacht leaped forward at full speed, and 10 minutes later plunged headlong into the mass of tangled weeds and rocks and drifting things which closed behind it like a tentacle octopus as she advanced, and which, before she had accomplished half a league, clogged the propellers and the steering gear, and so silenced the thrashing of her engines.

There were scowlings and mutterings among the men when they realized what they had done, but when the sharp commands of their captain rang out over the deck, they sprang to obey with a fury which at least evidenced their belief that through him only could they hope to escape from the dilemma. The engineers and their machinists were directed to unslip the propellers from their shafts, for she was a twin-screw steamer of the latest modern type. These were set inboard and were housed in the hull, the rubber chocks were hauled tight and lashed immovably and the rubber itself was pinioned in its place with iron clamps. Then the iron tubes through which the hydraulic force was to be exerted were shipped and adjusted. The connections were made with the mighty pumps so that all of the exertive power of boilers and engines might be applied to them and through them.

Rehabilitated in this way for her excursions among the weeds, steam was once more admitted to the cylinders, the mighty pumps began their work, and the gallant vessel forged ahead again defiantly. There was no longer anything left exposed which the floating mass could cut or hinder, nor had it sufficient solidity to impede her course, which although slow, was sure. Great masses of the floating debris gathered like hillocks in front of her and on either quarter, only to waste away and settle again into their former sedateness, when she had passed and the pressure was removed. Astern, the channel that she cut closed together again almost instantly, as moist sand fills in a human footprint. It seemed indeed almost as if the yacht were forcing her way through yielding masses of earth and brushwood instead of floating on the sea itself.

"There is only one way, Gregory," said the captain at last, thrusting the papers aside and rising to pace the cabin deck. "We can, at best, recover no more than half of this fortune. The other half lies on the starboard side out of our reach, and it were death to any man to seek it in this awful place. Were the Sallie floating on an even keel as last reported by Capt. Graham, then, I grant you, the thought would be terrible; as it is, it is out of the question. Your plans here show us that five of the ten compartments in which the gold was stored lie along the port side of the hold, just above what is now her water line. There are \$500,000 in gold in each: \$2,500,000 in all."

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